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CRITICAL NOTICES.

Records and Reflections, selected from her writings during half a century (April 3rd, 1840, to April 3rd, 1890), by LADY SIMON. [Wertheimer, Lea and Co., London.]

MATTHEW ARNOLD, writing of Heine, refers much of the poet's inspiration and genius to the inner promptings of the two great spirits under whose influence he came—the spirit of Greece, and the spirit of Judæa. “Both these spirits,” he goes on to say, “reach the infinite, which is the true goal of all poetry and all art—the Greek spirit by beauty, *the Hebrew spirit by sublimity*.”¹

It is precisely this sublimity of the Hebrew spirit which is so finely illustrated in the work before us. Those of us who have taken note of the emotion which the mere contemplation of the Deity, stirred in the ancient Jewish mind, those of us who are familiar with the Hebraistic passion for the Monotheistic conception as exemplified in the prophetic writings, the Psalms, or the Book of Job, we who have observed that intense spiritual craving for the simplification of all moral and religious truth, which—doctrinal or philosophical considerations apart—dominates the writings of the greatest Jewish reformers, from St. Paul to Spinoza, we, I repeat, can bear witness to the admirable justness of Matthew Arnold's criticism.

The elements of this sublimity are more easily assumed than analysed. It is a gift peculiar to Judaism. Milton alone, among the Gentiles, can be said to have caught the spirit of it, and its possession largely constituted his greatness. This sublimity of spirit defies all attempts at definition; it is something rarer and finer than enthusiasm, though, perhaps, falling short of actual, conscious worship.

It has nothing in common with that condition, either of mad religious frenzy or of sensuous visionary ecstasy, which has been frequently associated with weak, ignorant credulity and debased forms of religious superstition.

The materialistic tendencies of modern thought and the application of critical methods have done so much to stifle this impassioned out-

¹ Essays in Criticism. The italics here and elsewhere are my own.

pouring of the soul to God, that the possession of individual testimony as to the workings of the Divine within us becomes more and more precious in proportion to its rarity.

Regarded from this point of view, Lady Simon's *Records and Reflections* afford invaluable evidence as to the vitality of this religious spirit among the Jews of the present day. From cover to cover the work is characterised by one uplifted accent of religious exhortation and spiritual harmony. It exhibits a soul elevated above the things of this world, contending upon those spiritual heights to which its divine aspirations enable it to soar.

These *Reflections* are of particular value and interest to the thoughtful reader as illustrating the unbroken continuity of the Hebraistic idea of God, which to-day is apparently at one with that of the noblest Old Testament inspiration.

The Jewish conception of God is the outcome of the sublimity of the Hebrew spirit. Aspiration was, and is, characteristic of the Jewish mind. The Jew looked away from himself, outwards, upwards; never like the surrounding nations, downwards. From the very beginning of things, the Hebrew mind was dissatisfied with itself. Not content to be alone, it first conceived the notion that man was made for the knowledge of something outside and above him, but which he himself possessed in smaller measure. Examining the character of his own aspirations, and believing himself to be made in the image of the God he was seeking, he deduced the nature of the Deity from the infinite yearnings of his own spirit. He longed, with a desire he could not adequately express, for communion with that higher power of intelligence to which he felt his own spiritual nature to be akin. It was just because he realised his affinity with and relations to the Divine, that the Jew rejected all notion of an abstract Deity, as also of one who needed to be propitiated and dreaded. He utterly repudiated the idea of God as an Abstraction, an Ethical Principle, an Element, or a First Cause; his soul yearned after a living personal Deity, the spiritual Father, whose son he felt himself to be:—“*My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God*” (Psalm xlii. 2).

To the Hebrew, God was the infinite expansion of his own finite intelligence, the answer to his craving for sympathy, love and guidance; his spiritual Father, not far off, but very nigh to him; the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. The Hebrew mind became saturated with the idea of the nearness and omnipresence of an Almighty Father, so that daily, hourly communion with this God of infinite love and tenderness became, and is still, the Jewish ideal of worship.

Thus a complete absence of all mental servility, a complete exclusion of all slavish dread, was a marked characteristic of the Hebraistic mental and spiritual attitude. The pious Hebrew "walked with God," conversed with him as with a most intimate and loving friend.

It is an error to attribute—as many do—the doctrines of human dignity to the teaching of Christ alone. Certainly Christ and his followers taught it, but then Christ himself was born a Jew, and as such had learnt it from his youth upwards.

The Eighth Psalm exquisitely embodies the Hebrew estimate of man's dignity: "Thou hast made him *a little lower than the angels*, and hast crowned him with glory and honour."

It is in his subtle delineation of Adam's Hebraistic attitude that Milton's genius becomes so apparent: Adam walks and converses with God in the garden, and entertains the Archangel Raphael as little more than an equal.

It was Abraham's proudest title to be called "the friend of God."

This elevated view of man's relations to the Divine ennobled the Hebrew mind, and gave it that self-respect and dignity which has never ceased to distinguish it.

It is just such a noble, enlightened Deism as this which is set forth in the pages now before us.

There is scarcely a line, certainly not a page, which does not testify to the joy and privilege of daily, hourly communion with God, the "Father of the spirits of all flesh" (p. 2), as well as to the abiding sense of God's presence (p. 73). The author of these *Reflections* refers to the conviction of God's nearness to us as "the most purifying influence possible to man" (p. 37). God is a refuge in distress, a very present help in trouble. Not even the bitterest domestic bereavements can shake this faith in the infinite love of God. It is this implicit reliance upon God's wisdom and goodness which sustains her in hours of most severe affliction. This conception of God and of his love for man is, we read, the "basis of Judaism."

The mission of Israel, as defined by Lady Simon, is to propagate those true ideas about God which alone can stimulate men to righteousness; and she expresses it as her innate conviction that many of the miseries of human life, as well as "all the cruelties and all the persecutions that darken history, are the result of ignorance concerning God" (p. 70).

By walking with God the Israelite lives in the light of his countenance, and is influenced by God's love, mercy, peace, and righteousness. The Jewish law of life is summed up in the twice-quoted precept of the prophet Micah: "What doth the Lord require of

thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah vi. 8.)

It will be observed how, in the Jewish religion, the greatest stress is laid, *not* upon belief, but upon righteous acts, which, after all, are but the outcome of a noble faith. Thus, the Jewish religion is essentially a practical one; the life, not the creed, is emphasized.

This passive bearing of witness is, I take it, one of the distinguishing features of Judaism, past and present. The Jews were rarely an actively proselytizing nation. They are perhaps the only example in history of an eminently religious community, which, whether in or out of power, was characterised by a general absence of religious fanaticism of the kind referred to. They never regarded it seriously as their mission to compel others, either by force or argument, to share their beliefs.

Their interpretation of the mission of Israel is far other, and can have no other source than that of Divine inspiration; it is to live the life of God, to convince by example rather than by precept. This duty of bearing witness to the truth is scattered throughout the Old and New Testament, and was the prophetic and apostolic, as, centuries of persecution past, it has at length become the Christian ideal.

Inasmuch as Lady Simon's *Reflections* were not originally set down with any idea of publication, the fact that the book is not put forth as a contribution to the controversial literature of the day seems to me to enhance its value as a factor in that mission of Judaism which its author has so much at heart.

The Jews hold a position which is unique in history.

Deism is the civilised world's most ancient, as it seems likely to be its latest, religion.

The intellectual world has as it were—racial traditions of course apart—come back to Judaism. This goes far to prove, if, in the face of such evidence as the Mosaic theocracy, or St. Paul's missionary system, proof were needed, that the Hebrew mind has a genius for religion, and for its most sublime expression.

I cannot close this notice without referring to an objection which, from a pitiful and mistaken sense of loyalty, is often weakly urged against Jewish writings, that, elevated as is their tone of thought, there is no mention of Christ in their pages.

But from the Jewish standpoint this silence is perfectly logical, and argues nothing either as to appreciation or non-appreciation of the Christian ideal, any more than the very rare reference made to Martin Luther in modern Protestant writings argues any depreciation of that great reformer's work in effecting the breach with Rome. I

am not aware that in the above pages from which I have quoted any allusion is made to the prophet Elijah, and yet I am convinced that his name is one of the peculiar boasts of Judaism. Things are sometimes too generally admitted to require especial reference, and so it is with the Jewish appreciation of Christ. From the Deistic standpoint, leaders of thought among the Jews have long since done ample justice to the beauty of Christ's teaching and character. The question of his divinity is another matter which need not be entered upon here.

Did space permit, I should have liked to enlarge upon the many points of general interest, which a perusal of Lady Simon's book suggests. The character of the work is such that it cannot fail to attract a wide circle of readers: one will prize it as a treasury of scriptural quotation; another, perhaps, will read it for the references to eminent personages of the day which it contains; a third for the charm of the author's style; a select company among us will delight in the pure and rarefied spiritual atmosphere which we seem to breathe in its pages; but its noble toleration, its tender, gentle humanity must touch us all.

ALICE LAW.

Die Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes und seiner Litteratur, übersichtlich dargestellt von Dr. S. BÆCK. Kaufmann, Frankfort on the Main, 1894.

THE fact of a book like Dr. Bæck's *Geschichte* appearing in a second edition is sufficient evidence of its importance. Yet it may not be superfluous to point out its merits to a public which has not too many opportunities of instructing itself in the history of its ancestors; for the English edition of Graetz's comprehensive work is, apart from its being somewhat far from perfection, too voluminous and expensive to become popular. This aim is much better attained by Dr. Bæck's book, which, in a single volume, gives an excellent sketch of the whole of the Jewish history and literature from the Babylonian exile down to the present age. A particularly pleasing feature in the new edition is the literary appendix, which contains translations from the principal works of Jewish writers, beginning with the Greek period. The selection, although not complete, is sufficient, the translations are clear and carefully made. Entirely, but unjustly, omitted, is the modern pulpit literature, which is closely